

Nine Original Essays by the Staff of the Cincinnati Community Kollel



A Sukkos Reader

Season of Joy

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*To enrich the Cincinnati Jewish community
by creating an environment of Torah study
and providing access to our spiritual heritage.*



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*A sukkah, constructed of wood paneling and evergreen branches,
decorated with paper chains and a picture of the Four Species
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Honor Roll 5762

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Contents

Preface	11
Introduction: Sukkos, Uncovered	12
Dances with Rabbis	
<i>Rabbi Meir Minster</i>	14
Before There Was Sukkos...	
<i>Rabbi David Spetner</i>	20
Don't Worry, Be Happy!	
<i>Rabbi A. D. Motzen</i>	24
Of Huts and Houses (and Money)	
<i>Rabbi Yitzchok Preis</i>	29
The Peace of the Sukkah	
<i>Alter B. Raubvogel</i>	33
What is Wrong with Just Being Righteous?	
<i>Rabbi Shai Scherer</i>	38
Shemini Atzeres ...And the Power of Eight	
<i>Rabbi Ben Travis</i>	43
Days of Eternity	
A Look at the Four Days Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos	
<i>Rabbi Zev Weiner</i>	47
Sukkos: The Future	
<i>Rabbi Raphael Weinschneider</i>	55
Appendix: Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud	
The Writing of the Oral Torah	60

Preface

We are over the great hurdle. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are behind us.

Enter Sukkos.

Sukkos is referred to in our holiday prayers as a “Season of Joy.” In part, it is precisely because it follows the High Holidays that it is a time of joy. This is not because of any sense of relief that we may feel. Rather, having been judged on Rosh Hashanah, even if we have been found lacking, we have been able to reconcile ourselves with G-d and find forgiveness on Yom Kippur. This reconciliation with our Creator, if properly appreciated, allows for a joy that elicits the word “comfortable” alongside it. It is the warm and familiar feeling of serenity that exists when things are made right with those we care for most.

For this reason, perhaps, one’s sukkah is supposed to be a comfortable place. If it is uncomfortable, such as when it rains, we are exempt from the *mitzvah* of sukkah.

It is the serene comfort of the sukkah that underlies the joy of this holiday, and it is these emotions that are expected of us when the Psalmist writes (100:2), “Serve G-d with joy.”

The following essays have been written by our staff to help educate and inspire all of us to a greater appreciation for the joy of Sukkos. We hope that you will enjoy them.

We wish you a comfortable, serene and joyous Sukkos!

Rabbi Meir Minster

Rabbi David Spetner

Introduction

Sukkos, Uncovered

The essays in this booklet explore some of the themes which underlie the holiday of Sukkos (the biblical Feast of Tabernacles), its laws, and its customs. Sukkos begins on the fifteenth of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, two weeks after the Jewish New Year and five days after Yom Kippur.

The following is a brief outline of the holiday and its rituals. The highlighted words in the outer margins of this introduction are vocabulary words, which the reader will encounter while reading this booklet. These words appear beside their definitions; when relevant, they are presented in both singular and plural forms, respectively. (The transliteration of Hebrew words in this booklet follows Ashkenaz—western European—convention; thus “Sukkos,” not “Sukkot.”)

Sukkos is one of the Three Pilgrimage Festivals described in the Torah. (The others are Passover and Shavuot.) When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, all Jews were commanded to travel there for these holidays and to offer special holiday sacrifices. What we usually refer to as “Sukkos” is actually a fusion of *two* holidays, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres.

The first of these holidays, Sukkos, lasts one week. Of these seven days, only the first is designated by the Torah as a *yom tov*, a day on which most constructive and creative labor is prohibited. (In places outside of Israel, two days of *yom tov* are observed.)

The remainder of Sukkos is called *Chol Hamo'ed* (literally, “the mundane [part] of the festival”), because many restrictions on labor are more relaxed on these days.

On Sukkos, Jews are commanded by the Torah to live in *sukkos*, booths (thus the name of the holiday). Many laws govern the construction and use of a *sukkah*, but the most symbolic requirement is that the roof must be made of plant material which has been detached from the ground but has not yet

been made into a functional object. This material is called *s'chach*, a covering. The term *sukkah* is derived from the

word *s'chach*.

Another prominent observance on Sukkos is the taking up of the **arba'ah minim** *arba'ah minim*, the Four Species. These consist of a date palm frond (*lulav*), two branches of willow (*aravos*), and three sprigs of myrtle (*hadassim*), which are bound together, as well as a citron (*esrog*). (The Four Species are sometimes referred to collectively as a “*lulav*.”) These are taken all seven days

of Sukkos, except on the Sabbath. In the synagogue, prayers are recited while holding the Four Species, including the **Hoshanah** (*Hoshanos*) *Hoshanah* service, in which the congregation circles a Torah scroll while carrying the Four Species. Each circuit is called a *hakafah*.

The seventh day of Sukkos is also known as *Hoshanah Rabbah*, the day of the Great *Hoshanah*. On this day there is an extended *Hoshanah* service, and the congregation circles the Torah scroll seven times.

The second holiday, Shemini Atzeres, is a full-fledged *yom tov*, similar to the first day of Sukkos. However, the Torah does not require the use of a *sukkah* or the taking of the Four Species on this holiday—proof that Sh'mini Atzeres is a holiday in its own right.

The annual cycle of reading weekly Torah portions in the synagogue ends and begins anew on Sh'mini Atzeres, and this is commemorated by the celebration of Simchas Torah (Rejoicing of the Torah). In the synagogue, the Torah scrolls are removed from the Ark, and the congregation dances with the scrolls, making seven circuits of the synagogue. In the Diaspora, Sh'mini Atzeres is observed for two days, and Simchas Torah is celebrated on the second of those days.

Dances with Rabbis

The joy and excitement felt in the synagogue on Simchas Torah makes it a unique day in the Jewish year. People of all ages dance with the Torah, in celebration of the completion of our annual cycle of Shabbos Torah readings. The unity at that moment affirms the inseparable bonds between the Jewish people, the Torah, and G-d.

The timing of these emotions could not be better. Coming at the end of the Sukkos festival, a period defined as “the time of our gladness,”¹ Simchas Torah serves as the climax of the weeks-long process of *rapprochement* between G-d and his nation. The feelings of distance, awe, and fear, in the days surrounding the High Holidays have given way, and in their place there is happiness and joy and a sense of closeness and accessibility. The involvement of everyone in the dancing on Simchas Torah heightens our awareness of the warmth and sense of acceptance engendered by our renewed relationship with G-d.

Interestingly, this sense of closeness and accessibility, shared by all on Simchas Torah, finds its contrast in another celebration which also occurs during Sukkos. In the time of the Temple, on each night of the Intermediate Days of the Festival a special water-drawing celebration² would take place. This celebration was called *Simchas Bais Hasho'eiva*—literally, the Rejoicing of the Place of the Drawing. The Mishnah³ declares, “Whoever did not see the ‘Rejoicing of the Place of the Drawing’ never saw rejoicing in his life.”

¹ Sukkos liturgy, paraphrasing Deuteronomy 16:14-15 (Levush §642).

² On the Intermediate days of Sukkos, a unique water libation was mandated among the services of the Temple. Each night, water was specially drawn for the service of the following morning. It was this drawing that precipitated the celebration. The source for the propriety and naming of this celebration will be discussed later.

³ Talmud, Sukkah 51a

Ordained at Ner Israel Rabbinical College by Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, of blessed memory, **Rabbi Meir Minster** oversees the academic excellence of the Kollel’s staff scholars. He also delivers the Daf Yomi (page a day of Talmud), Women’s Chumash, and other classes.

At this gathering, however, the dancing was exclusive—“Pious men and men of deeds would dance before them.”⁴ Maimonides further clarifies the criteria for participation.

“It is a great *mitzvah* to maximize this celebration. Neither the common (unlearned) people nor [simply] anyone who desired to would perform [in these celebrations]; only the greatest of Israel’s wise men, the heads of the yeshivos and members of the High Court, the pious, the elders, and men of deeds. These were those who would dance, clap their hands, sing, and rejoice in the Temple on the days of the Festival of Sukkos. However, the entire people—the men and the women—would come to see and hear.”⁵

Today we observe a commemorative form of this celebration, by the same name, without any limitation on participation. However, this does not change the fact that the actual Water-Drawing Celebration in the Temple was designed in a manner very different from that of our celebration on Simchas Torah. What is the significance of this discrepancy? As we explained, inclusion rather than exclusion would seem to be more in line with the spirit of the festival, what message is being transmitted here in the practices of these two events?⁶

Perhaps we can glean an insight from a look at the source for this water-drawing ceremony. The Talmud⁷ associates the name of this ceremony, *Simchas Bais Hasho'eiva*, the Rejoicing of the Place of the Drawing, with the following verse. “*U’she’avtem mayim besasson*—with joy shall you draw water.”⁸ Although both of these Hebrew words, *simcha* and *sasson*, can be translated as “joy,” there is a subtle difference between them and they describe different types of joy.

The *Bnai Yissaschar*⁹ explains the difference between them in the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Sukkah and Lulav, 8:14

⁶ Note: Although we are comparing and contrasting these two celebrations, it is important to maintain the proper perspective on their differing origins. The water-drawing celebration goes back to ancient times. As stated, it was observed at the time of the Temple and its source can be traced to the Bible. Simchas Torah as we know it developed as a custom among the Ashkenazic communities prior to the writing of the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Jewish Law), within the last thousand years.

⁷ Talmud, Sukkah 50b

⁸ Isaiah 12:3

⁹ *Essays on the Month of Tishrei*, 10:22.

following way. Sasson describes the joy one feels in anticipation of something desired, confident in its eventual fulfillment. *Simcha*, on the other hand, is the feeling one has when he actually receives or acquires that which he desired. As an example, King David, praying for a Divine message foretelling G-d's salvation, asks, "Restore to me the joy (*sasson*) of Your salvation."¹⁰ In contrast, the prophet Isaiah, describing the period after G-d's salvation says, "And they will say on that day, Behold, this is our G-d; we hoped to Him that he would save us. This is Hashem, to Whom we hoped, let us exalt and rejoice (*v'nism'cha*, from the word *simcha*) in His salvation."¹¹

Using these definitions, we can now note an observation that might shed some light into the formation of the water-drawing celebration. The source for this celebration, the verse, "With joy shall you draw water," speaks of the joy of the anticipated (*sasson*). The name for the celebration, however, "the Rejoicing of the Place of the Drawing" uses the word for joy (*simcha*) that describes something already acquired. This name is certainly more in line with the qualities of those who are permitted to participate, the accomplished wise men of Israel. Apparently, the focus shifts from anticipation to accomplishment. What is the implication of this change of perspective, and how does it relate to the difference in our celebration of Simchas Torah?

Let us add one more element to our discussion. The *Yam Shel Shlomo*¹² establishes that when one makes a *siyum*, a celebration for the completion of a section of Torah study, it is a *mitzvah* for others—even those who did not participate in the learning—to join in the celebration. One of the explanations given for this is that once someone has mastered an area of learning, he is then able to share that knowledge with others. His learning is thus a source of joy for everyone. By joining in the celebration we express this fact, and acknowledge that everyone benefits from this learning.

Simchas Torah, the celebration of our completion of the Torah reading, is a *siyum*. It is only right that everyone is invited to participate in the celebration—the joy is truly everyone's. The appropriate name for this type of joy is *simcha*, the happiness one feels at the at-

tainment of something treasured.¹³ Everyone dances because everyone has benefited—those who have studied, and those who will share from them.

The Celebration of the Water-Drawing is a different type of celebration, but not because it celebrates water instead of Torah; the Talmud says many times that water is symbolic of Torah. One example:

For it was taught: [The Torah states that after crossing the Sea of Reeds and entering the Wilderness of Shur:] "And they went three days in the Wilderness and found no water."¹⁴ Upon which those who expounded verses metaphorically said: There is no metaphoric meaning for the word "water" other than Torah, as it says: "Ho, everyone that is thirsty, go to the water [i.e. Torah]."¹⁵ It thus means that when they went three days without Torah, they immediately became exhausted. The prophets among them thereupon rose and decreed that they should publicly read from the Torah on the Sabbath, make a break on Sunday, read again on Monday, make a break again on Tuesday and Wednesday, read again on Thursday, and then make a break on Friday, so that they should not be kept for three days without Torah.¹⁶

It would not seem farfetched to say that the water of the water-drawing celebration is also symbolic of Torah. Perhaps the celebration marks more than just the drawing of the water but also celebrates our ability to draw from the deep wellspring of Torah. If this is true, then, both Simchas Torah and the Simchas Bais Hasho'eiva are celebrations of Torah but from different perspectives. The Simchas Bais Hasho'eiva is not a celebration of completion like Simchas Torah; to the contrary, it is a celebration of drawing forth, of a beginning. It is the joy of anticipation, the excitement that accompanies the start of a process of learning. This joy would correctly be called *sasson*, as in the verse cited as its source, "With joy (*sasson*) shall you draw water."

This joy, however, is not the joy that is referred to in the name of the celebration. As we mentioned, the celebration is called *Simchas Bais Hasho'eiva*, which denotes a joy of accomplishment and completion. This name, as well as the exclusiveness of the dancing, limited to

¹⁰ Psalms 51:14

¹¹ Isaiah 25:9

¹² Talmud, Bava Kama, end of Chapter 7.

¹³ Levush §669

¹⁴ Exodus 15:22

¹⁵ Isaiah 55:1

¹⁶ Talmud, Bava Kama 82a

¹⁷ Talmud, Berachos 5b

the wise and the accomplished, suggests that the real joy is for those who have achieved. We seem to be saying that although it is a celebration of beginning and anticipation, the real focus is on attainment. If this is true then why celebrate the drawing, the beginning at all? Furthermore, if we are in actuality celebrating the completion, then everyone should participate as we do on Simchas Torah.

The truth is that there is great joy in the learning of Torah, regardless of the outcome. “The one who [studies] much and the one who [studies] little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven.”¹⁷ Just beginning an area of study is reason for celebration. In fact, at every *siyum* it is customary to begin the next section, even as we are completing the last. The start of some new learning is a part of the celebration. On Simchas Torah, too, we immediately begin reading from the opening section of the Torah as soon as we finish the last verses.

Surely, the water-drawing celebration marks the joy of anticipated Torah study and the start of that journey. Unfortunately, the hopes of anticipation do not always live up to expectation. The desire to begin is not enough, and that first drawing must not be the last. The connection to our wellspring has to be maintained always; a Jew’s need for the study of Torah is constant. The focus of the water-drawing celebration was shifted from the anticipation and the start of Torah learning to examples of real accomplishment to drive home this point. It is during Sukkos especially, at the time of our gladness in developing a renewed relationship with G-d that we need to be on guard to this reality. That which we have begun must be maintained and strengthened and not just celebrated.

Simchas Torah has a different tone altogether. Building on our accomplishments of the previous year, we look forward to a new start and achieving even more in the study of Torah. We all take joy in what has been accomplished. Everyone has benefited—those who studied and those who did not. The greatest benefits, though, are yet to come, when the efforts of the past become the model for future growth.

There is a liturgical poem written especially for Simchas Torah which is recited by some before the Torah is returned to the ark. It begins with the words, “*Sisu v’simchu b’Simchas Hatorah*—Rejoice (*sasson*—joy of anticipation) and be glad (*simcha*—joy of accomplishment) on Simchas Torah.” The order seems reversed. On Simchas Torah we first finish the Torah and only then restart it. On second

thought, though, based on our new understanding the instruction is clear. Experience the joy of making a commitment to start learning Torah this Simchas Torah, but make it a start that will culminate in the joy of completion.

May we grasp the opportunities presented by all the celebrations of Sukkos and merit to achieve the fulfillment of the entire verse, “With joy shall you draw water from the well of salvation.”

Before There Was Sukkos...

There is a great deal of fascination today with understanding what the lives of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs were like. What was the nature of their relationships, their temperaments, and their struggles both physical and emotional? This interest is quite natural, as we initially try to appreciate historical figures by placing them in our own framework of experiences.

However, the result of much of this creative patchwork about the intimate lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their spouses has generally been conjecture at best and an outrage at worst. Even if these historical analyses had been performed objectively, without the author's imagination playing a central role, the results would still be faulty. The reason for this is because contemporary authors are attempting to sift through the historical record of the Torah, in much the same way that an archeologist pieces together random snapshots of a civilization's remains. The problem is, though, that the Torah is not a historical document with random selections from our ancestors' lives. When dealing with Biblical figures, the only things we know about them are the things that the Author of the Torah deemed worthy of sharing with us. Thus, massive amounts of data about their lives are missing—not on a random basis open to statistical analysis, but rather because they were not relevant to what G-d wanted to teach us based on their lives.

This being said, how are we to understand how the Sages of the Talmud seem to apply their own context to the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? There are many examples, but the primary one is in

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the Talmud (Yoma).¹ There we are told that Abraham kept all of the laws of the Torah even down to some of the Rabbinic decrees. Other sources make clear that this applies to Isaac and Jacob, as well, and perhaps to the twelve tribes, too. Many sources show them celebrating elements of Passover before it ever occurred. Leaving aside how this would have been possible (the Patriarchs *were* prophets), aren't the Rabbis guilty of trying to make our ancestors look like Rabbinic Jews just like themselves?

The truth is, though, that just as the Torah is not a history book but a guide to living, the Talmud as well is not interested in the *fact* that Abraham et al ate matza before there was ever an Exodus from Egypt. What the Sages wanted to convey was that the commandments of the Torah, and even those of the Rabbis, are not merely commemorations of events or statutes responding to social needs. The body of Jewish law responds also to spiritual necessities and realities. The performance of *mitzvos* has a *cosmic* effect. Therefore the significance of eating matza on Passover is not only to commemorate the Exodus, but in so doing to create a spiritual impact. That impact was able to be made, even if not fully, by the *mitzvah* acts of our Forefathers even before the “natural” cause of the *mitzvah* had yet occurred.

Let us examine how this idea relates to the holidays. Time as created by G-d is pregnant with potential. From the beginning of the world there were times of the year which contained within them the seeds of redemption, of Torah, of joy, of forgiveness, of tragedy, of judgement, and so on. These times were actualized into the holidays that we celebrate through historical events. The Exodus from Egypt brought out Passover. The Giving of the Torah at Sinai brought forth Shavuot. Rosh Hashanah recalls the first day of man's creation, when he was called to account for his eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and as such became an annual Day of Judgement. Yom Kippur is the anniversary of Moses' descent from Mount Sinai with the second tablets of the Law, signifying G-d's forgiveness of the people for the sin of the Golden Calf.

What the Patriarchs did in their performance of the holiday *mitzvos* was to relate to the seeds of potential that already existed at those times on the calendar.

Another important theme that helps us understand the activities

¹ 36b.

of the Patriarchs is what is referred to as “*Ma’aseh avos siman l’banim*—the action of the Patriarchs is a sign for [what will happen to] the sons.” Thus they may have also been laying down the spiritual groundwork for the eventual actualization of those dates into the holidays they became.

It is in the case of Sukkos in particular that we find a parallel to this idea. In Sukkos we find the holiday as a response to a historical event, and yet a form of Sukkos existed in the Torah even before that event actually occurred.

What was the historical actualization of Sukkos? The actualization of the other holidays is much more obvious as was mentioned above. When it comes to Sukkos the Torah merely tells us² that we are to sit in huts during this holiday because G-d had us sit in “sukkos” when we went out from Egypt. There is a dispute in the Talmud³ as to whether this is a reference to actual booths that the Jews lived in, or a euphemism for the special clouds that surrounded the Jews throughout their forty years in the Wilderness.

The Tur⁴ asks that regardless of how one understands what these “sukkos” were, since we had them after we left Egypt, in the spring-time, shouldn’t Sukkos also be in spring, just after Passover?

The Vilna Gaon⁵ offers a fascinating explanation based on the opinion that the “sukkos” of the Wilderness refers to the Clouds of Glory. According to the Gaon, those clouds were not always with the Jews. After the sin of the Golden Calf the clouds left, returning only after the Jews had received forgiveness for that sin. When Moses came down with the second set of tablets signifying G-d’s forgiveness, it was on the tenth of Tishrei, which became the first Yom Kippur in history. The next day, the eleventh of Tishrei, Moses instructed the people in the building of the Tabernacle, which would be the place where G-d’s presence would once again rest among the Jewish people. Over the next three days, the supplies for construction were gathered, and finally on the fifteenth of Tishrei the construction of the Tabernacle began. On that day, when the Jews were once again on the way to making G-d’s Presence manifest in their midst, did the Clouds of Glory

² Leviticus 23:42-43

³ Sukkah 11b

⁴ Orach Chaim, chapter 625

⁵ Commentary to Song of Songs 1:4

return. That day became the first day of the holiday of Sukkos, when we reenact dwelling in G-d’s cloud cover by going out to our sukkos.

According to the Vilna Gaon, the historical actualization of Sukkos was not the initial cloud cover that the Jews received when they left Egypt. It was the return of the clouds, brought on by their building of the Tabernacle that Sukkos commemorates. After the Jews had fallen and then been forgiven, they were shown that, despite their past failure, they would still dwell together with G-d with the protection of his Divine Presence. That is why, on the anniversary of the clouds’ return, after the forgiveness of our own Yom Kippur, we venture out to our own sukkah, to bask in the protection of G-d, instead of the four walls of our home. This is why Sukkos is after Yom Kippur and not after Passover.

Building on this idea, *Meshech Chochma*⁶ makes an interesting observation. In the two instances where the holiday of Sukkos is mentioned in the book of Exodus,⁷ prior to the return of the Clouds of Glory, Sukkos is not referred to as such, but rather by the term, *Chag Ha’asif*, the Holiday of Gathering. This, says *Meshech Chochma*, is because the holiday of Sukkos as we know it had not yet been actualized historically. Only after the return of the Clouds, did the holiday become Sukkos, with its command to build huts.

Before there was Sukkos, there was already a time of the year designated and primed to become the Sukkos that we know today—a time when, despite our shortcomings throughout the year, G-d invites us back to the shelter of his Presence to celebrate, together.

⁶ Commentary to Exodus 23:16

⁷ 23:16, 34:22

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

If someone were to ask you, “What is the most difficult commandment to observe?” how would you respond? Go ahead, think about it for a moment. You have 613 commandments to choose from.

I was asked that question many years ago, and while I don't know what I responded, I do remember being surprised at the answer. Rabbi Eliyahu (the Gaon) of Vilna says that it is the commandment to be happy during the festival of Sukkos, “*V'samachta b'chagecha*.”¹

Rather than tackle the obvious question of why being happy on Sukkos is the most difficult commandment, let us first examine the connection between Sukkos and *simcha* (happiness).

In the Torah, the festival of Sukkos has two names, *Chag Hasukkos* (Festival of Booths) and *Chag Ha'assif* (Ingathering Festival). However, in our prayers it is known as *Z'man Simchaseinu*—the Period of our Happiness. What message are our Sages, who formulated our prayers, trying to send us? How is the essence of Sukkos encapsulated in the concept of happiness?

Let us examine the source for the name:

You shall make the festival of Sukkos for seven days, when you gather in from your threshing floor and from your wine press. You shall be happy on your festival—you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levite, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are in your cities. Seven days you shall celebrate to Hashem, your G-d in the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, for G-d will have blessed you in all your produce and in all your

handiwork, and you will be completely joyous.²

The Torah's description of the commandment is simply “*v'samachta b'chagecha*—you shall be happy on your festival.” Be happy. There's no elaboration on how to do it; just be happy. However, a quick look at the “Spirituality” section of your local or on-line bookstore will reveal how elusive the quest for true happiness really is. Hundreds of titles, all promising true happiness. But what is true happiness, and how do we attain it? Moreover, *how* can G-d command us to be happy for an entire week every year? Is G-d commanding us to feel an emotion on demand?

Furthermore, why in our prayers does this commandment define the holiday? Why not focus on the sukkah, the lulav, or the harvest? If it is simply because the verse mentions the commandment to be happy by Sukkos, then Shavuot should also be known as *Z'man Simchaseinu*—the Torah also describes Shavuot using similar words, saying “*v'samachta*—and you shall be happy.”³ There must be more to it than that.

Perhaps you are an astute reader, and you noticed that the passage describing Sukkos *repeats* the commandment of rejoicing when it says “*v'hayisa ach sameach*—you will be completely joyous.” This, then, would be why Sukkos, not Shavuot, is known as *z'man simchaseinu*. However, the words seem to infer a *promise* rather than a commandment.⁴

We return to our earlier questions. Why is Sukkos a period of *simcha*, how do we attain this *simcha*, and how can G-d expect us to feel an emotion on command? Perhaps if we gain a better understanding of the other two, Biblical names of the holiday, we can shed light on the Rabbinical name used by the Sages.

Let's take a closer look at this holiday. What are we celebrating?

The Torah⁵ tells us the following about the festival of Sukkos. We must take the Four Species (citron, palm, myrtle, and willow), be happy, and sit in booths. Why? Because G-d had us dwell in booths in the desert.

¹ Deuteronomy 16:14

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² Deuteronomy 16:13-17

³ Deuteronomy 16:11

⁴ Rashi, commentary to Deuteronomy 16:15

⁵ Leviticus 23:39-43

We must now ask ourselves several basic questions. What is special about *these* four species? How does taking these species lead to *simcha*? What are these booths that we dwelled in, and why are they a cause for celebration?

Let's start with the booths. *Rashbam* explains that the festival of Sukkos arrives just as the houses are newly filled with the fresh produce of the fields. At that time, G-d wants us to remember that for forty years we wandered in the desert in temporary dwellings, without permanence. Therefore, we must now give thanks to and show our appreciation of the One who gave us all the produce, the permanent homes, and the wealth. The purpose of the commandment is to prevent us from becoming arrogant and saying that we produced this wealth on our own.

The name *Chag Hasukkos*, then, signifies showing gratitude to G-d for giving us a permanent home in the Land of Israel. This idea is also represented by *Chag Ha'assif*, for it is specifically during the harvest that man is tempted to credit his own hard labor and ignore G-d's hand in everyday life.

Now let us turn our attention to the Four Species that we are commanded to take. Why did G-d single out these particular species? *Maimonides* explains⁶ that they represent the joy of leaving the parched, barren, desert and entering a land of magnificent trees, beautiful fruits, and flowing rivers. We take the best the land has to offer. We put together the nicest looking and most fragrant fruit and branches of the land and remember that they are G-d's gift. Once again we find that the holiday is one of giving thanks to G-d for giving us the Land of Israel and its produce.

Let us continue analyzing the passage we began with ("You shall make the festival of Sukkos for seven days..."). In it there is no mention and commandments other than *r'iya*—appearing before G-d in the Temple. However, unlike Pesach and Shavuos, where the requirement is for only one day each, on Sukkos we remain in the Temple for the entire week-long festival. Why is this so?

Also in this passage, there is a passing reference to the *assif*, the "ingathering" of the produce that comes at the end of the harvest. Is

⁶ *Moreh Nevuchim (Guide to the Perplexed)*, Part 3, ch. 43

⁷ Compare Rashi's comments on Deuteronomy 16:13 to those on Leviticus 23:39.

⁸ Commentary to Deuteronomy 16

the *assif* mentioned here simply as a frame of reference for the season,⁷ or is it perhaps more fundamental to the holiday?

*Abarbanel*⁸ sees the *assif* as an integral part of the holiday. Celebration of a harvest festival at the culmination of the harvest is a custom followed by every agricultural society. What G-d asks from us, in order that the celebration not turn into self-indulgent merrymaking, is that we focus instead on the Creator, who gave us this land and all its produce. This is why, he explains, only Sukkos is celebrated in the Temple for all seven days.

On Pesach the length of the holiday is seven days because it commemorates the seven days from when the Jewish People left Egypt until the final destruction of the Egyptian army at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds. However there is only a one-day requirement to appear in the Temple. That is because of all the toil that beckons the people to return to their fields. The harvest season has just begun. Shavuos is also only one day because it commemorates a one day event, the giving of the Torah. On Sukkos, however, we thank G-d for giving us the Land of Israel; therefore the seven days correspond to the seven species for which Israel is praised⁹ (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). By the time we reach Sukkos we can relax, knowing that our produce and the promised wealth it represents are safely stored in our warehouses. With this peace of mind we have the time to spend the entire festival period at the Temple.

The *assif* serves one more very crucial function. According to *Abarbanel*, it is the *source* of the happiness. At the end of the harvest a person is well aware of how much produce he has. If he is happy with his share, he is guaranteed to continue being happy throughout the year, for if he is the type of person who is happy with his share at the start of the year he will continue being happy with what occurs to him throughout the year. However, a person who is needlessly bitter at the start of the year will continue being bitter.

But how, you may ask, does one learn to become happy with his lot? The key is in the weekly Torah portion of Re'eh. In it, the Torah mentions happiness six times; all of them in connection to eating from one's produce or livestock. Though it is only the last ones that are in reference to Sukkos, each passage is juxtaposed with a reference to G-d's blessing. What is the message?

⁹ Deuteronomy 8:8

Of Huts and Houses

(and Money)

The Torah is telling us: “Recognize that G-d is the source of everything you have, few or many, good or seemingly bad. This is what G-d has ordained for you. Remember that this is the same G-d Who took the Children of Israel out of Egypt, tended to their every need in the desert for forty years, and then brought them into the Land of Israel. This G-d, who, like a father, only wants what is best for you, gave you only that portion which is fitting for you.”

This recognition naturally brings a person to true happiness. G-d doesn't simply command us to be happy on Sukkos. He says, “Recognize this one fact. Then I guarantee that you will be ‘*ach sameach*—only happy’ throughout the year.”

This concept is not limited to produce. It applies to income from any other source. Once a year, on Sukkos, we are to remind ourselves that although we are skilled and we may have put many hours of work into our businesses, it is G-d who is the source of all of our wealth.

We now return to our very first question. Why, according to the Gaon of Vilna, is the commandment of “*v'samachta*” the hardest commandment to observe? The Gaon explained that it is extremely difficult to remain truly happy for the entire seven-day period. With our new understanding of true happiness, perhaps it is this particular brand of *simcha* that it is so difficult to achieve for seven days. It requires a constant awareness and recognition of G-d's role in our daily business affairs. It is not easy to give credit to someone else for your work.

This year, as we sit in our sukkos, let us make a mental list of all the blessings that G-d has bestowed upon us. Let us list them, then thank G-d for each one individually. We will find that not only are we fulfilling an aspect of the commandment to be happy, but we also will be guaranteed the fulfillment of the promise at the end of that passage that says “you will be in constant joy” throughout the coming year.

The term *sukkos*, huts, makes its first appearance in the Torah many pages and several generations before the holiday bearing that name was established. *Yaakov Avinu*—our patriarch, Jacob—built sukkos while en route from Aram to Israel.¹

These sukkos may seem unrelated to the Sukkos festival, but they are in fact quite significant in helping us develop an understanding of this holiday. The thoughts that follow are based on the words of Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon in his masterful work, *Matnas Chaim*.

Let us analyze Jacob's sukkos and, in so doing, develop a better appreciation of our own.

Why did Jacob build these sukkos—and, more importantly, why is their construction recorded for posterity? After all, the Torah does not record many other details of Jacob's travels. The question is strengthened by the stated purpose of these sukkos. As the Torah details, “For his flocks he built sukkos.”² Why do we need to know how Jacob protected his animals during his sojourn? Perhaps most perplexing is the fact that Jacob opted to name the place of his sojourn to reflect these huts. “Therefore he called the name of the place Sukkos.”³ Why?

¹ Genesis 33:17

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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To answer these questions, we must uncover the message hidden in these “huts.” When contrasted with a house, a hut implies transience. When opting to store something in a hut rather than in a house, one displays a lack of value or limited interest. By choosing to build huts for his flocks, in direct contrast to the houses for his children, Jacob was displaying and teaching a prioritization of family over flocks, destiny over dollars.

That lesson is important enough, but when put into full context it becomes even more striking.

Jacob had recently left the environs of the epitome of greed, his father-in-law Laban. To avoid being cheated out of every penny of his salary, Jacob had to outmaneuver this deceitful boss. Out of character with his natural self, Jacob had to devote time, energy, and resourcefulness to securing and safeguarding his wages.

Jacob subsequently had a strange, nocturnal encounter.

Jacob was left alone [having crossed his family over the Yabok River and returning alone] and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. He [the “man”] saw that he could not overcome [Jacob], and he struck the socket of [Jacob’s] hip. Jacob’s hip socket was dislocated... Then [the “man”] said, “Let me go... And [Jacob] said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me... [The “man”] said, “No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with the Divine and have overcome.”⁴

Clearly this was no ordinary wrestling match. The victor of any physical confrontation is unlikely to request a blessing from his attacker before releasing him from a stranglehold. Even less likely is a prophetic declaration by the attacker-turned-loser about the victor’s eventual new name.

The strange “man” with whom Jacob wrestled that night is seen by the Zohar as a spiritual representative of his wicked brother Esau.

Before understanding this struggle, we must address the context in which it developed. Why, in fact, was Jacob alone and open to the potential for attack?

The Talmud tells us, “He had forgotten small jugs and went back to retrieve them.”⁵ Cognizant that every penny of his earnings was

⁴ Genesis 32:25-30

⁵ Ibid.

yielded in honesty, Jacob viewed each item in his possession as having a purpose. Nothing among his many possessions could be deemed “extra” or unnecessary. Each item was meant to be used by Jacob for some lofty purpose.

Jacob’s focus on monetary possessions was perceived by those who opposed him as reflective of a weakness, some level of greed. This “man” attacked, perceiving an opportunity to capitalize on this perceived spiritual deficiency. But he was wrong. Jacob had not developed a hunger for money, nor was he obsessed with his wealth. He viewed himself as a trustee of the Divine and his property as entrusted for Divine use. No victory could be proclaimed against Jacob or that for which he stood.

This spiritual wrestling match was followed by his rendezvous with his not-very-brotherly brother, Esau. Included in their dialogue was a curious exchange. Commenting on the vast gifts that Jacob had sent him, Esau remarked, “I have *plenty*... Let what you have remain yours.”⁶

Jacob responded, “Please accept my gift... I have *everything*.”⁷

Rashi,⁸ citing the Midrash, contrasts the terms used by Jacob and Esau to describe their respective wealth. Whereas Esau gloated in the volume of his fortune, Jacob noted that he had *everything* – everything he could require he had, because whatever he had is everything he could possibly need.

Jacob prevailed in three money-oriented challenges. Outmaneuvering Laban, returning for seemingly inconsequential flasks, and a showdown with Esau were all heavily focused on attitudes toward money. Jacob realized that his children and future generations might misunderstand any or all of his actions as being rooted in an obsession with his wealth. Out of context and without full understanding of the principles involved, Jacob might be perceived as heavily focused on money for money’s sake.

He therefore built sukkos. Although he had no intention of dwelling in this region long-term, he built *homes* for his family in sharp contradistinction to the shabby *huts* he provided for his flocks. He then drew attention to the second class status of property vis-a-vis family by calling this new town sukkos. Jacob thereby preserved the

⁶ Genesis 33:9

⁷ Ibid. 33:11

⁸ Ad. Loc.

message: Money and property have a purpose and must be appreciated, but they are not the end in and of themselves. They are not primary. Rather, they are to be secondary to my real goals—my family, foundations of the destiny of Israel.

With this message in mind, we can now turn to the holiday of Sukkos and *its* huts.

Sukkos is referred to in the Torah as the Holiday of the Ingathering. The crops would generally be harvested at this time of year. After reaping his harvest, a farmer can become heavily focused on his new revenues. The bounty can easily become the central driving element in his thoughts and his life. Greater goals can be forgotten, while attention is dedicated to amassing greater wealth—if not for Sukkos.

Sukkos proclaims, “Step out of the house and reflect on your place in this world. Recall what deserves a permanent dwelling and what should be relegated to second class status.” The physical sukkos which become our abodes for the holiday of Sukkos, the story of Jacob’s sukkos and the city he named Sukkos, all serve to drive home the lesson of balance in our attitudes toward our money and possessions. They are very unimportant in and of themselves, but they have significant roles to play if we can use them appropriately. With this message in mind, we can step into our *sukkos* and perfect our sensitivities toward the *real* value of our possessions. Having done so, we will be able to utilize our material possessions as tools for spiritual excellence.

Alter B. Raubvogel

The Peace of the Sukkah

In most prayer books, the blessings recited over the Four Species are found in the pages just before the Hallel prayer. In the synagogue service, that is the point where most people unwrap their Four Species, recite those blessings, and “shake the lulav.”

However, the Chassidic custom is to perform the *mitzvah* of Lulav in the sukkah. That usually means taking time to fulfill this *mitzvah* at home, before leaving for the synagogue. In Boston, though, the congregation of the Bostoner *Rebbi*, Rabbi Levi Horowitz, manages to satisfy both protocols. They have a sukkah directly above the synagogue. At the appropriate point in the service, the congregation pauses, while the *Rebbi* leads his followers upstairs to the sukkah.

Why is it so important to combine the *mitzvos* of sukkah and the Four Species?

Among other things, the Four Species symbolize four different kinds of Jew.¹ The citron, a fragrant fruit, represents someone with both knowledge of Torah (metaphorically, a pleasant scent) and good deeds (fruits). The myrtle smells nice, but it bears no fruit; this represents someone who has learned Torah but has no good deeds to his credit. The palm, on the other hand, bears fruit (dates), but it has no smell; this symbolizes an unlearned person who nonetheless has performed good deeds. The willow, which has neither perfume nor fruit, represents a Jew who is neither learned nor accomplished.

Together, the Four Species are a metaphor for a united Jewish nation, a people at peace with itself.

¹ Vayikra Rabbah, Emor

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Our Sages often refer to another icon of peace—or, rather, a person wholly devoted to promoting peace: Moses’ brother, Aaron the High Priest. The High Priest is the people’s advocate before G-d in the Tabernacle, and G-d appointed Aaron to that position because of his ability to empathize with others.² One of Aaron’s strengths was his talent for making peace.

For example, if Aaron found it impossible to mediate a quarrel, he would approach one of the parties—we’ll call him Reuven, and the other man Shimon—in private. “Reuven,” he would say, “I just spoke to Shimon, and he asked me to tell you that he is really sorry for what he said...”

Then Aaron would pull aside Shimon and tell him the same story about Reuven.

The next time Reuven and Shimon would meet, each would assume that the other wanted to reconcile their differences, and so they would resolve their argument.

According to the Zohar,³ G-d rewarded Aaron by placing the Clouds of Glory around the Children of Israel during their travels in the Wilderness. These clouds represented G-d’s closeness to His people, and they protected the Children of Israel from the elements.

Today we commemorate those Clouds of Glory by living in a sukkah on Sukkos.

Sitting in a booth seems pretty far removed from Aaron’s love of peace, but there is actually a very tight connection between them. Proof of that connection is found in *Ma’ariv*, the evening service, in which we ask G-d to “spread over us” the “*sukkah* of peace.”

So how does the sukkah represent peace? A sukkah is temporary and makeshift; don’t we want peace to be permanent? And once we’re asking questions, let’s add another—how were the Clouds of Glory a fair reward for Aaron’s efforts to make sure that everyone got along?

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains⁴ that the sukkah, the Clouds of Glory, and the capacity to get along with each other are all associated with the ability to rise above materialism, to forego one’s needs and wants for the sake of a greater, spiritual objective.

² See Exodus 4:14 and Rashi’s commentary there, based on Talmud, Shabbos 139a.

³ Emor 103. The Zohar is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written around two thousand years ago.

⁴ *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, vol. 2, pp. 106–110. The bulk of the material in this essay can be found in Rabbi Dessler’s writings there.

The sukkah is perhaps the easiest to explain. One is not allowed to cover a sukkah with normal roofing materials; the Torah’s building code requires the use of unprocessed plant matter. We spend an entire week in the sukkah, eating, drinking, reading, even sleeping, outside the shelter of our homes. This is supposed to remind us that there is life beyond Pergo flooring, Corian countertops, and security by ADT. The sukkah serves to teach us that in order to live spiritual lives, to appreciate that which is truly meaningful (i. e., the service of G-d and the perfection of our character), and to be receptive of the Torah’s dictates, we must relent in our pursuit of the material.

The ability to put our physical desires aside is also necessary if we are to live in peace with one another. Material wealth is finite; there is supply, there is demand, and there is competition—in the end, *someone* will hold the aces, but if they are in your hand, then they won’t be in mine. The only way that people can find success in life *and* coexist peacefully, without feeling like they are competing against each other, is if their goals are *spiritual*.

Aaron the High Priest made it his life’s work to bring such a peace to his people. Because he fostered spirituality among the Children of Israel, he was rewarded with the Clouds of Glory—a physical manifestation of the Divine Presence. The appearance of the Clouds of Glory was proof that Aaron’s people, G-d’s people, had become a spiritual people.

The sukkah, itself a reminder that spiritual wealth is more precious than material wealth, commemorates those Clouds of Glory. And it is such a metaphorical “sukkah of peace” that we ask G-d, every night, to spread over us. We pray to G-d that he protect us from materialism and allow us to enjoy instead the light of spirituality: “Spread over us Your sukkah of peace, and establish us with good council before You.”

As we mentioned before, the Four Species represent a coming together of all kinds of Jews, in peace. In a way, this is an extension of the theme of the sukkah: the Jewish people can rise above the rat race, as it were, in harmony. It also reminds us that we must love every Jew, regardless of his or her religious stature.⁵

⁵ In one sense, the message is that we must love our fellow Jews *despite* their occasional inobservance. We don’t whitewash over the fact that a myrtle bears no fruit, for example, but we embrace it, metaphorically, as a member of G-d’s Chosen People.

Our Sages tell us that because of this symbolism, the taking of the Four Species atones for the Jewish people. G-d says, "I cannot destroy them; let them be bound together as a group and atone for each other." G-d then manifests His presence over His people, who have united in His honor.

In other words, by gathering together the Four Species, we mimic the work of Aaron and, like Aaron, we are rewarded with a closer relationship with G-d. How fitting, then, it is that we perform this *mitzvah* in the sukkah, a model of the Clouds of Glory.

The sukkah is itself an atonement. *Yalkut Shimoni*, shortly after discussing the Four Species, says:⁶

Why do we make a sukkah after Yom Kippur? To tell you that G-d sits on Rosh Hashanah in judgement of the entire world, and that on Yom Kippur He seals His decree—and perhaps the Jews have been sentenced to exile! Therefore we build a sukkah and exile ourselves from our houses. G-d then considers this [an atonement], as if we had been exiled to Babylon.

Rabbi Dessler explains that from G-d's standpoint, the objective of exile is not so much that we suffer as that we *become less materialistic*. Banishment from our land is meant to wean us from the comforts afforded by autonomy, and to refocus our attention on matters more worthwhile.

The sukkah, as we've explained, serves the same purpose.

The Talmud⁷ teaches that after the Messiah comes and G-d rewards the Jewish people for its loyalty, the nations of the world will protest that they were never given a fair chance to prove themselves, as well. G-d will reply that He gave them ample opportunities to follow the straight and narrow.

"Nevertheless, I have an easy *mitzvah* called 'Sukkah.' Go and perform it."

Right away, everyone will pick himself up and make a sukkah...

G-d will make a hot, summer sun shine on them, and every one of them will kick his sukkah and walk out...

But didn't Rava teach that one who is suffering is exempt from [the requirement to live in] the sukkah?

⁶ Emor, paragraph 653

⁷ Avodah Zarah 2b - 3a

Granted, one is exempt, but does he have to *kick* the sukkah? Immediately G-d will sit down and laugh at them.

Remember that the point of the *mitzvah* to live in the sukkah is to encourage us to forego materialism. This is a concept that is not exclusive to Judaism. Many a non-Jewish intellectual has preached the value of morality, spirituality, and self-sacrifice for higher ideals. But to *internalize* that attitude, despite the often burning desire to indulge oneself, is very difficult. The average man on the street is really not interested in sacrificing the "good life" out of idealism, particularly when the going gets rough. Therefore the nations will resent the moral imperative that the sukkah represents.

The Jewish people is different. In the heart of every Jew is a holy spark, the knowledge that the Torah and its lessons are not only true but, ultimately, rewarding.

Yalkut Shimoni expresses this idea in another way.

Rabbi Chanina said, "The Messiah will only come so that G-d can give the nations two *mitzvos*: sukkah and lulav. But all of Israel will learn Torah directly from G-d..."⁸

Some day, G-d will tell the nations of the world that they must curb their appetites and learn the lessons of the sukkah and the lulav.

Those are lessons that we, the Chosen People, have been internalizing for thousands of years. We continue to reinforce those teachings every Sukkos, when we perform the *mitzvos* of the holiday and think about their meaning.

All that training will pay off when we can resume the intimate relationship with G-d that our forefathers in the Wilderness knew so well. May that happen soon.

⁸ Psalms 23, paragraph 682

What is Wrong with Just Being Righteous?

The Sages instituted a special prayer for the welfare of our leaders in the thirteenth blessing of the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer). This blessing begins with the words “*Al Hatzadikim V'al Hachasidim*—on the Righteous and on the Pious.” In contrast with the salary arrangements negotiated by the English authors of old,¹ the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*, the Men of the Great Assembly (the group of 120 Sages who led the Jewish people at the beginning of the Second Temple era) did not get paid for their writing by the word. Since they didn't have this incentive to add more adjectives and/or adverbs wherever the opportunity arose, one must pause and consider what exactly they were trying to convey by the seeming repetition of “righteous” and “pious” as two separate categories of leaders. What is the distinction between these two seemingly synonymous adjectives? (Furthermore, is there a connection between this distinction and the festival of Sukkos?)

We are all familiar with the five *megillos* (scrolls) read throughout the Jewish calendar—Esther on Purim, the Song of Songs (Shir HaShirim) on Passover, Ruth on Shavuot, Lamentations (Eichah) on Tisha B'Av, and Ecclesiastes (Koheles) on Sukkos. Perhaps a little less well-known is the connection between each *Megillah* and the date on which it is recited. Let's give two examples. Esther is read on Purim, the fourteenth of the month of Adar; as described in the *Megillah*, the

¹ I.e., Charles Dickens, etc.

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Jewish people fought the enemy on the thirteenth of Adar and rested on the fourteenth.² The Book of Ruth is recited on Shavuot, to teach us that the Torah was given only through affliction and poverty.³

As to why Koheles is read during the Sukkos festival, Abudarham⁴ states that King Solomon gathered together the people in Jerusalem during the Sukkos following a Sabbatical year,⁵ and publicly read not only the Book of Deuteronomy but Koheles, as well, to reprove Israel. *Hagahos Minhagim* suggests the connection is that Sukkos is the Season of our Joy,⁶ and Koheles praises joy—or whoever rejoices with his allotted portion in life, and does not pursue money, but derives pleasure from what he has, is blessed with a gift from G-d.⁷ But perhaps there is a deeper parallel between Sukkos and Megillah Koheles, one that relates to the distinction between the “Righteous” and “Pious.”

Koheles 10:2 states: “The *leiv* (heart) of a wise man is to his right and the *leiv* of a fool is to his left.” Obviously, King Solomon, the wisest of all men, is not suggesting that the anatomical makeup of intellectuals differs from that of fools. Seemingly bothered (as well) by the simple translation of these words, the Targum⁸ interprets, “The heart of the wise is [inclined] to acquire Torah knowledge, which was given from G-d's right hand, but the heart of a fool is [inclined] to acquire possessions of silver and gold.”

However, many years ago, I heard the following approach⁹ to this apparently problematic verse. Many of us are accustomed to books beginning with the famous “Once upon a time,” and concluding with “The End.” Contrary to this is our sacred Torah. Not only does it never end; we read it all over again, every year, as the Tur¹⁰ states, “in

² See *Mishnah B'rurah* 688:1.

³ See *Mishnah B'rurah* 490:17 (quoting *Ruth Zuta* and *Yalkut Shimoni*) and *Lekach Tov*, Talmudic and Midrashic anthology on the Bible and Five Megillos.

⁴ Guide and commentary to prayer by Rabbi David ben Yosef Abudarham, fourteenth-century scholar; p. 40

⁵ See I Kings 8:2. This was done in accordance with Deuteronomy 31:11.

⁶ Deuteronomy 16:14-15, “You shall rejoice on your festival... And you will be completely joyous.”

⁷ See introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes, Judaica Press edition, 1992.

⁸ Targum Onkelos (authoritative Aramaic translation, c. 90 C.E., with some suggesting it dates back to Sinai)

⁹ Heard from the late Mr. Zimmerspitz (Toronto, Canada), of blessed memory.

¹⁰ *Orach Chaim* 668. Written by Rabbi Yaakov ben Rabbeinu Asher, 1275-1340.

order to prevent the Satan from prosecuting us with a claim that we've finished [the Torah] and have no desire to learn it again." As we re-start on every Simchas Torah, the concluding day of the Sukkos festival, we in reality are attaching the last word of the Torah, "Yisrael," with the first word, "B'reishis." More specifically, we attach the last letter of "Yisrael," *lamed*, with the first letter of "B'reishis," *beis*, spelling the Hebrew word *leiv* (heart).

In Koheles, which is read on the Sabbath of the Intermediate days of Sukkos—just prior to the "attaching" ceremony on Simchas Torah—King Solomon points out a crucial lesson for us all. The heart and mind of a wise man look to the right and join the last letter of the Torah with its first letter, all the way to the right of the Torah scroll, spelling "*leiv*." (A Torah, like any Hebrew book, reads from right to left.) The fool, on the other hand, looks to his left as he completes the reading of the Torah, the *lamed* of "Yisrael," sees no more words, and closes up the Torah, as if it had the words "The End" inscribed on the parchment, Heaven forbid. We specifically read Koheles during Sukkos to make a statement against the "Accusing Angel," that we, the wise, look again to the right, to the beginning, completing the word "*leiv*;" in a sense, we go the extra mile by starting all over again. And so the heart of the wise is to the right, to spell out "*leiv*" and start the Torah all over again, while the fool's heart is to the left, as he closes his book. If one, Heaven forbid, ends off the Torah to the left without going back to the beginning, then all it was to him was a typical book.

From Shemini Atzeres till Passover, we add the phrase "Who makes the wind blow and brings down the rain" to the second blessing of the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer). *Shulchan Aruch*¹¹ advises that on Simchas Torah one should recite this phrase ninety times, in order to accustom oneself to the insertion. However, The Chasam Sofer¹² suggests that one should repeat this phrase 101 times. Why? What do the extra eleven recitations accomplish? What connection is there between 101 and Simchas Torah?

The Chasam Sofer, in attempting to address these questions, perhaps even complicates matters even further by quoting the Talmud:¹³

¹¹ *Code of Jewish Law*, written by Rabbi Yosef Caro (c. 1500).

¹² *Responsa 20 and Orach Chaim 114*. Written by Rabbi Moses Sofer (1762-1839), Rabbi of Pressburg and acknowledged leader of Hungarian Jewry.

¹³ Chagigah 9b

"There is no comparison between one who learns a portion of Torah 100 times to he who reviews it 101 times." What does the last review accomplish, over and above what the one-hundredth did over the ninety-ninth? The Maharsha's commentary¹⁴ on this passage raises another question. He says, "The extra, one-hundred-first time is Heavenly." Why? What is so incredibly crucial to this one-hundred-first repetition?

The Rif,¹⁵ fortunately, puts it all into perspective, and in turn answers all of our questions. The Rif states that "...One who learns 100 times will not forget that learning... Therefore, one could say that such learning is not *lishmoh* (solely for the sake of learning), but is being done in order to prevent forgetting. However, one who reviewed 101 times shows an element of *lishmoh*, and therefore his reward is great, [since the one-hundred-first time was not needed to prevent forgetting.]" Along these lines, the *Anaf Yosef*, another commentary, expands on this, stating that the one who reviewed 101 times shows love for Torah, thereby deserving to be called a servant of G-d, for he went beyond the normal call of duty.

Now it is clear why reviewing one's learning 101 times is far superior to learning only 100 times. The former expresses an element of *lishmoh* in one's dedication to learning. He has gone the extra mile, beyond the letter of the law. Furthermore, we can add that the *Chasam Sofer* wanted to instill in us this push for the "extra mile," by repeating G-d's praise 101 times specifically on Simchas Torah, as we connect the *lamed* on the left with the *beis* at the far right, showing our trait of being wise-hearted. We are showing our love for the Torah by starting it all over again. Unlike the fool who merely closes up shop, we go the extra distance and begin again.

This seems to be a running theme throughout Sukkos, one of going one step farther, thereby showing G-d our love and *lishmah* attitude. That is why some synagogues have the custom to sing and dance while chanting "Who makes the wind blow and brings down the rain" 101 times during the Simchas Torah services. And, once again, that is the message King Solomon was hinting to us in Koheles, which we

¹⁴ Hebrew acronym for Moreinu Harav Shlomo Eidels of Ostroh, Poland (1550-1632), author of monumental commentaries on the halachic and aggadic sections of the Babylonian Talmud.

¹⁵ Acronym for Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto of Venice, author of a commentary found in *Ein Yaakov*, a compendium of Aggadic passages from the Talmud.

read specifically on the Sabbath of the Intermediate days of Sukkos, just prior to this chanting of G-d's praise on Simchas Torah.

Now we will be able to understand the distinction between “righteous” and “pious,” as well as any possible connection to the holiday of Sukkos. The *Yaavetz*¹⁶ writes that a *tzadik*, a righteous individual, fulfills all of the 613 commandments according to their requirements. The term *chossid*, pious, on the other hand, connotes one who does more than he or she is required to do by the Torah. The two adjectives are therefore not mere repetitions by the Men of the Great Assembly in the silent prayer, but rather they do indeed depict two types of characters. The former can be compared to one who reviews his learning 100 times, i.e. doing all of the commandments, while the latter does a little more than he's required to do by Torah law (i.e., the one-hundred-first review). One cannot have any complaints against the “righteous.” However, the “pious” one, a level higher, goes the extra mile, beyond the letter of the law and beyond the call of duty. It is that distinction that is tied to our message of Sukkos, of being the *leiv chochom*, the “wise heart,” repeating G-d's praise 101 times and being considered, “pious.” Let us all put in an effort to go that extra distance, put a little more “heart” into our Sukkos, and, hopefully, in that merit, we will all be together in Jerusalem with the third and final Temple, speedily in our days.

Rabbi Ben Travis

Shemini Atzeres

...And the Power of Eight

“There is no answer.”

That has commonly been the response I've gotten when talking with friends about the problems we face today—in Israel in particular, and in the world in general.

Granted, exactly what will spell the end of our troubles and bring about sunnier times may indeed at this point seem elusive; nonetheless, looking at a source in our holy Torah which describes a scenario we hope will be manifest in short order, the advent of the Messianic period, should give us hope. We'll see that this source in particular has relevance to us now as we approach the holiday of *Shemini Atzeres*.

The Talmud¹ relates to us the following series of occurrences that are to take place in the years immediately preceding the Messianic redemption. Seven years before the Messiah's arrival, in what we'll call year one, there will be an unequal distribution of G-d's blessing—one city will experience plenty, while the residents of another locale will be starving. The next year no one will enjoy plenty, while year three will see widespread famine. Concomitant with the lack of physical nourishment of year three, the Talmud tells us, there will be a tremendous spiritual decline. Things will turn around in the fourth year and no one will be left without, at least in a physical sense, yet no one will prosper greatly till year five, when along with the physical bounty, a spiritual renaissance will take place as well. In year six there will be murmurings of the Messiah's arrival; year seven will see a war

¹ Sanhedrin 97a

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¹⁶ Acronym for Rabbi Yaakov ben Tzvi of Emden, died 1776.

between the gentile nations and Israel. Then, states the Talmud, following year seven, the Messiah will come.

The Talmudic text leaves us with several questions. Firstly, the order of occurrences is strange; we would think only those years which chart a steady rise in spirituality should be included in the years that we'll now classify as the "birthpangs" of the Messiah. Years one to three, where we see a steady decline in "religious awareness," would logically seem in dissonance with the Messianic process. Why, then, does the Talmud include a move *away* from spirituality as part of the process of redemption?

An additional difficulty we encounter in this Talmudic excerpt is that even if we want to posit that the "natural crescendo" towards the Messianic era really begins in year four, the occurrences of year seven appear out of place. The "unpleasantness" of the first three years of the cycle should be, by year seven, long behind us. Why, when we appear so close to the dawn of an age that the prophets tell us will be a time of peace on earth, do we have to experience the pain and suffering of armed conflict?

Our final difficulty derives from the language of the Talmud. If we analyze the Talmudic text, we'll notice it describes the year of the Messiah's arrival as "the year *following the seventh*," rather than "the *eighth* year," (the actual number of the year), as it had done for each previous year. We know the Sages chose their words carefully, so even this subtle change must be meant to convey meaning.

In answering our first difficulty, why the Talmud includes spiritual decline in the Messianic process, the famous Maharal (Rabbi Yehudah Loewy, of sixteenth-century Prague) has us take note of a phenomenon that we see in nature. Before a seed can produce another plant, we know the seed itself must disintegrate. New physicality takes root from the breakdown of the old. It is the same way, the Maharal tells us, in the spiritual realm. In order for a new and better state of existence to develop, the old has to wither away. This is the process the Talmud charts in the first three years of the seven-year buildup to the messianic era. We see the breaking down of the Old World order as a necessary prerequisite to the establishment of the new. It therefore is truly an integral part of redemption, without which the process of growth cannot take place.

We also see from the Talmud that the dynamic of the New World order will be very much in place by the end of the seven-year cycle.

This is why, the Maharal tells us, there indeed must be a war between Israel and the nations of the world. To quote the words of Rabbi Loewy, "At this point [the seventh year] begins the power of the Jewish nation as it is empowered by the New World order." Because at that time the other nations of the world will still be living within the Old World framework, there naturally must be conflict. Thus the negativity experienced in year seven will be totally different from that which we'll experience years one to three. The earlier suffering will be the natural outgrowth of decline. The later conflict will be the final hurdle before the finish line.

Finally, in the eighth year, the Messiah comes. We asked why the Talmud describes this year as the year following the seventh. In many places we find that the number seven represents G-d in covenant with His world and the world in communion with G-d. The Torah tells us that completeness in this world was achieved with seven, with the creation of the world in seven days. Initially Noah was given seven *mitzvos* to perform and all humanity was split up into seventy nations (a derivative of seven). Shabbos, our "remembrance of creation," is the seventh day of the week, and the Hebrew word for an oath² is *shevu'a* (from *sheva*, seven). The Jewish agricultural cycle is seven years, with particular significance being given to the year following seven cycles of seven (*Yovel*, the Jubilee year). The hymns of the First and Second Temples, praising the presence of G-d on the earth as we know it, were played on a harp of seven strings.

The number eight, in contrast, signifies the unit one that comes after seven. (This is why the eighth year is described as the year following the seventh.) That unit represents none other than G-d Himself, Who is One, showing mastery over the completeness of His creation. One of the accomplishments of the Messiah will be to unite the entire world while making the reality of G-d as Master of the Universe obvious to all; we say at the end of the *Aleinu* prayer (the concluding prayer of most of our services) "G-d will be King over all the world—on that day (i.e. the period of the Messiah) G-d will be One and His Name will be One." The song of the days of the Messiah in the Temple will consequently be played on a harp of eight strings, in recognition of the increased manifestation of G-d's presence in this world.

² When someone makes an oath, his commitment becomes a *religious obligation*. He thus brings G-d into his temporal dealings.

Rabbi Zev Weiner

Days of Eternity

A Look at the Four Days Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos

With this understanding of seven and eight we can also understand the order of additional offerings brought during *Sukkos* and *Shemini Atzeres*. We know that during the seven days of *Sukkos* the priest in the Temple would bring seventy bulls, corresponding to the seventy nations (seventy, again, a derivative of seven). This represented, as we said, completeness in the physical realm. On the eighth day, *Shemini Atzeres*, we know only one additional bull was brought, signifying the level eight, above and beyond the physical. (This one bull also represented the Jewish people, whose job it is to proclaim G-d's unity in the world.)

We see, therefore, latent in *Shemini Atzeres*, spiritual potential that parallels the much-enhanced spirituality that we will experience in the messianic age. In Israel, on *Shemini Atzeres*, as well as on the night of *Shemini Atzeres* in many congregations in the Diaspora, we open the Ark and recite many verses that make reference to the unity of G-d, that "there is none beside Him" (the conclusion of the very first verse we recite). We also include verses alluding to the Messianic era ("He shall say on that day, 'Behold—this is our G-d, we hoped to Him and He saved us...'"³). May it be the Divine will that we may speedily see the greater spirituality that will be manifest at the time of the coming of the Messiah, and that we may merit once again to experience the joy of a *Sukkos* and *Shemini Atzeres* in a rebuilt Jerusalem.

Sukkos is a time designated for great joy and celebration with G-d. In fact, one of the names given to *Sukkos* is, *Z'man Simchaseinu*,¹ which means "the Time of our Rejoicing." While explaining the full significance of that name is beyond the scope of this essay, there is one reason that we should be aware of. *Sukkos* is the culmination of the forty-day process known as the Days of Awe. During this time we try to come closer to G-d through honest introspection and repentance, hoping that we will find favor in His eyes. We all know that sincere petitions are never turned away, especially during this crucial time. It is for this reason that we rejoice on the festival of *Sukkos*. We are showing our appreciation for being given the opportunity to cleanse ourselves, and to start our year on the right foot.

When we investigate the relationship of *Sukkos* to The Days of Awe, there is a question that must be addressed. Looking at a calendar, we find that *Sukkos* begins four days after Yom Kippur. If the process of atonement culminates with *Sukkos*, then what is the significance of these four days? Webster's dictionary² defines the word "process" as "a series of actions or operations conducting to an end." These interim days need to somehow connect *Sukkos* with The Days of Awe. What qualities can be found in them that bridge the gap between these two holy times?

¹ This reference is found throughout the liturgy of *Sukkos*.

² *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*

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³ Isaiah 25:9

In order to answer this question we must first analyze a teaching from our great Sages found in the *Midrash*.³ When the Torah describes the holiday of Sukkos and its various observances, it states:

“You shall take for yourselves *on the first day* the fruit of the citron tree, a frond of a [date] palm, twigs of a plaited tree, and brook willows; and you shall rejoice before Hashem, your G-d, for a seven day period.” (Leviticus 23:40)

The theme of this verse is the various types of vegetation needed for the fulfillment of the *Arba'ah Minim*, the Four Species, used during Sukkos. The question that our Sages grapple with is, Sukkos begins on the *fifteenth* day of Tishrei. Why, then, does the Torah refer to the first day of Sukkos as, “the *first day*?” Our great Sages answer that while it is true that Sukkos begins on the fifteenth of the month, it is still a beginning—for once we complete the Yom Kippur service, we are devoid of our past transgressions. It is only when Sukkos begins, that G-d starts to count our sins once again. We can now understand that when the Torah calls the first day of Sukkos “the first day,” it is to teach us this lesson.

Many commentators deal with the true meaning of this Midrash. Although we can now read the verse in the Torah without pause, what does it mean that Sukkos begins our new accounting for the year? Whatever happened to the interim days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos? Can we believe that there are four days a year on which we have no accountability, when we can do no wrong? And if our sins do count during this period, what message are our Sages sending us?

The Bardichever Rebbe⁴ gives us a possible approach with which to answer these questions. He explains that there are two ways to repent our sins before G-d. The first method is to repent out of fear. The fear that we are referring to here is the awareness of eventual punishment for our insubordination. This is the basic motivation through which a person comes to repentance. This method of repentance changes all of our sins so that they are viewed as inadvertent

³ Midrash Tanchuma Leviticus (Emor), chapter 22. See the Midrash in its entirety, as it gives a parable that explains the method by which our sins are atoned for.

⁴ The real name of this Chassidic Master was Rabbi Levi Yitzchok, from the town of Bardichev. See the original Hebrew text, found in his book *Kedushas Levi Deuteronomy* (Ha'azinu), second paragraph, “Mi...”

transgressions. There is, however, a more sublime motivation leading us to correct our ways. That is repenting out of love. When we focus on all the gifts that G-d bestows upon us day to day, we begin to realize how much He loves us. This awakens our desire to repay G-d by adhering to His goals and the direction He sets out for us. If there are areas that require fixing, our love will motivate us to improve them. This method of repentance changes all of our sins so that they are viewed as merits in our favor.

Yom Kippur is the time of the year when we repent out of fear; the year is beginning anew, and we don't want a year of hardships. Therefore, because of our repentance, our sins will not be effective evidence against us in the Heavenly Court. Yet they also cannot be counted in our favor. Sukkos, however, is the time that we come to repent out of our intense love of G-d. Now our sins are viewed as merits. This is the time that we want G-d to count our “sins.”

According to this interpretation, the concept of “counting our sins” is not to be taken literally; rather, we look at this idea in a more abstract sense. The Midrash is giving us insight as to why G-d starts counting our sins on the first day of Sukkos. After all, it is difficult to fathom that we could go four days without doing one transgression. Using the Bardichever's understanding, we can now see a deeper connection between Sukkos and The Days of Awe. It is not until Sukkos that we attain the repentance that truly “counts” for us.

Yet one question still lingers. What about the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos? How do they fit into this connection? It seems that according to the Bardichever Rebbe these interim days are unassociated with the holy days that surround them. Therefore, let us look at another interpretation to the above stated Midrash.

Rabbi Issur Yehuda Malin⁵ presents an idea that a number of the earlier commentators mention. They propose that during the four days leading up to Sukkos, we are so busy preparing our Sukkah and buying the Four Species that we don't have the time to commit any sins. Rabbi Malin takes issue with this opinion. There is an axiom found in Judaism that tells us that even the most righteous individuals are bound to make mistakes.⁶ If so, how could a mere few *mitzvah* preparations ward off the possibility of sin?

⁵ Rabbi Malin was the head of the Jewish court in the town of Brisk, Poland.

⁶ This notion can be found in Ecclesiastes 7:20.

He answers based upon a teaching of the great sage, the Vilna Gaon, who comments on the following Mishnah

Akavia ben Mahalalel said: “Consider three things and you will not come into the grip of sin: ...And before Whom you will give *din* (justification) and *cheshbon* (accounting)—before the King Who reigns over kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.”

The Vilna Gaon asks, what is the significance in the redundancy of the words “justification” and “accounting?” He answers that with every sin there are two transgressions that we are culpable for. First, we went against the Will of G-d and did something we shouldn’t have. This is the “justification” that we will need to give before G-d. Second, the time that we sinned could have been used constructively, but we squandered the opportunity. This is the “accounting” that we will need to give.

Rabbi Malin suggests that one is accountable for his lost time, provided that the intent to do wrong precedes the action. However, without this intent we are only responsible for the sin alone. According to Rabbi Malin it is inevitable that we falter and sin, even though Yom Kippur just passed. Yet since we are busy with the *mitzvos* of Sukkos, our minds are not thinking of sins. Therefore when we sin our intent is absent, and we are no longer accountable for our mistake. We do still need to give a justification, but at least part of our transgression is removed. Using this idea we can now understand the Midrash. When it says, “Sukkos is the beginning for the accounting of our transgressions,” we must focus on the word “accounting” (in Hebrew, *cheshbon*). When we sin during this four-day period we are held responsible by G-d, but only for the action. The beginning of our accountability, as explained by the Vilna Gaon, begins only after we enter into the Holiday of Sukkos. At this time we are no longer focused on obtaining and building for the holiday.⁸

While this interpretation differs from the one offered by the Bardichever Rebbe, there is one common denominator. We asked,

⁷ *Ethics of the Fathers*, chapter 3

⁸ The Midrash seems to stress the juxtaposition between the taking of the Four Species and the beginning of the accounting. It seems that the Midrash is telling us that to extend the time of accountability a little further, we should wave the Four Species. By doing so, we are still involved in a *mitzvah* and we won’t intend to sin, similar to the days before Sukkos.

“What ever happened to the interim days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos? Can we believe that there are four days a year when we have no accountability, when we can do no wrong? And if our sins do count during this period, what message are our Sages sending us?” It is clear that both approaches subscribe to the opinion that our sins do count during the four days prior to Sukkos. Both Sages give us insight into the Midrash, but their answers do not suffice to explain how these days connect Yom Kippur to Sukkos. We must not forget that a process is one long chain of events, connected from beginning to end.

Rabbi Yonasan Eibenschutz,⁹ renowned scholar and kabbalist, explains a passage in the Talmud that reveals to us depth and meaning regarding these four days. The Talmud¹⁰ asks:

What does Satan say on Yom Kippur?

They responded that on Yom Kippur, Satan has no power to speak against the Jewish people.

Why?

Rami the son of Chamah says that the numerical value of “*hasattan*” [Hebrew for “*the Satan*”] is 364. That means Satan only works against us 364 days of the year. On the day of Yom Kippur, Satan has no power.

Rabbi Eibenschutz is bothered with the arithmetic found in this passage. He says, if we were to add the numerical value of Satan’s name it only adds up to 359. Where does the extra five come from that allows for the Talmudic statement to be accurate? The answer lies in the way the Talmud chose to spell Satan’s name. Notice that the Talmud refers to Satan as “*hasattan*,” “*the Satan*.” In Hebrew, these two references differ by only one letter, the letter *hey*, which has the numerical value of five. The Talmud obviously counted this letter *hey* as part of the name, and that is how we get the number 364. According to Rabbi Eibenschutz, this letter is extra. Satan’s name is not “The Satan;” therefore, *five* days must go unaccounted for.

Using this discrepancy, Rabbi Eibenschutz reveals to us a most incredible idea. He says that there are five other days during the year

⁹ This idea can be found in his *Sefer Ye’aros D’vash*. See the tenth discourse, which can be found in book one, in the paragraph beginning with the words, “And with this we can understand...”

¹⁰ Yoma 20a

that Satan has no power against us. Four of these supernatural days are the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, the very days that we are trying to understand. The fifth is the first day of Sukkos,¹¹ the time that we first take the Four Species in our hands. We can now start to perceive a deep significance in these four days. They are unique; they give us a reprieve from the constant battle against Satan, just like Yom Kippur. It seems clear that on these four days we have the ability to withstand sin and temptation.

We find a similar idea mentioned by *Kli Yakar*.¹²

During the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos we do not commit any sins. The reason for this is that while one is involved in a *mitzvah*, he is protected and saved from any transgression.

Here too we find the opinion that during the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos a Jew does not sin. The reason for this phenomenon is stated clearly. It is important to note that both of these Sages understand our original Midrash the same way—that when the Midrash tells us that “Sukkos is the beginning of the counting of our sins,” the Midrash must be understood literally.

However, nothing happens in a vacuum. For us to receive this four-day gift, we need to be preparing for Sukkos. Our actions, coupled with heavenly intervention, create our break from transgression.

Using the understandings of Rabbi Eibeschutz and *Kli Yakar* we can answer the first question presented in our article. We asked, “If the process of atonement culminates with Sukkos, than what is the significance of these four days?” The answer is clear. These four days hold a vast potential for us. Firstly, Satan, the one who often-times

¹¹ See note 7. Rabbi Eibeschutz uses a similar idea to explain the significance of the first day of Sukkos.

¹² This statement is only a small part of a much larger issue. The thrust of the author’s question is the following. We find in Leviticus 23:40 (see page one), that G-d commands us to take the Four Species on the first day. The significance of this verse is found in the Midrash that tells us Sukkos begins the accounting of our sins. *Kli Yakar* asks, there are several *mitzvos* relating to Sukkos that are mentioned throughout the surrounding verses. Why does the Torah connect the observance of the Four Species with the notion of Sukkos being the start of our accounting? During his lengthy answer, he makes the above-mentioned statement.

leads us to sin, is powerless against us. This is our latent power. By preparing for Sukkos through obtaining the necessary materials, we have *mitzvos* protecting us and saving us from sin. This is our active energy. Together, they give us the ability to break the natural law that dictates that sin is inevitable. The four days leading up to Sukkos are truly significant. They are anything but a few ordinary days that give us time to commute to our family and friends for Sukkos.

All that remains is the second, and more difficult, question that began our research. We asked, Webster’s dictionary defines the word “process” as “a series of actions or operations conducing to an end.” These interim days need to somehow connect Sukkos with the Days of Awe. What qualities can be found in them that bridge the gap between these two holy times?

We all know how crucial The Days of Awe are. Within a short time, our entire year of happiness and success is decided. We also can muster up the energy necessary for a day of complete repentance. At this time we are all probably making new resolutions for the coming year. After all this hard work and effort, why is it that we remain the same? Why do we find ourselves consistently battling the same issues year in and year out?

I would like to suggest an answer: *We do not really think that we can change*. It is true that we sincerely pray before G-d, and that we do want to improve, but in our minds we are feel incapable. The result of such a self-defeating attitude is that we don’t succeed, and we keep hitting the same wall.

G-d, in His infinite wisdom, knows the frailty of man and compensates for it. He teaches us that we can succeed in life, even in the areas of greatest challenge. Herein lies the greatness of the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos. Just before we give up on trying to live up to our Days of Awe personae, G-d gives us a gift, four days of experiencing the reality that we *can* do it. During this time all the elements are in our favor to succeed. All we need to do is follow His directives. The result is tremendous. Seeing that we can exist on a higher plain gives us the strength and momentum to continue our aspirations toward growth. This is the ultimate kindness. We get this opportunity exactly when we need it, right after Yom Kippur. Having these four days allows us to actualize our desire to grow, which continues the repentance process. This brings us to Sukkos, the time when we rejoice. Our rejoicing is not only for the opportunity to be close to

G-d. We are also rejoicing because we have the ability now to *stay* close to G-d.

We now understand that the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos are not only a bridge that connects the two holidays; they are a gift that strengthens our resolve to keep on growing. Yom Kippur isn't over after the shofar blast. A Yom Kippur without the four days after it is a potential tragedy waiting to happen. We have the opportunity to concretize our goals for the coming year and to realize that we can live our lives constantly growing with G-d. With this understanding we now see that the four days that precede Sukkos are essential for us.

We must take advantage of this great gift. G-d is making real and lasting repentance a true possibility. Let us all heed the call of these four precious days and not let them go to waste. In doing so, we create a greater appreciation of G-d in this world. It is our charge to bring this *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's name) into the world. By doing so we will have a truly joyous Sukkos. May that be G-d's will.

Good *Yom Tov!* (Happy holiday!)

Rabbi Raphael Weinschneider

Sukkos: The Future

Throughout the Torah, every time Sukkos is referenced, it is placed after all the other holidays. In most instances the Torah lists Passover, Shavuos, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and then finally Sukkos.¹

Let us review what each of these commemorate. Passover marks the date on which G-d took us out of Egypt. Shavuos is the commemoration of our accepting the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Rosh Hashanah is the date on which G-d finished creating the world. Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement. Sukkos commemorates the “sukkos” we dwelled in during our wanderings in the desert, from the time we left Egypt to the time we entered Israel. As to what those “sukkos” were, there is a discussion in the Talmud.² Rabbi Akiva says they were huts, similar to the ones that we construct during our holiday, while Rabbi Eliezer explains that G-d surrounded the Jews with His Clouds of Glory; our huts are simply as close as we can get to mimicking those clouds.

Most of the holidays mentioned above clearly belong on the calendar exactly where they are. We celebrate Passover on the day G-d took us out of Egypt. We celebrate Shavuos on the day that we accepted the Torah. Sukkos, however, seems misplaced. That which we are commemorating was a daily fact of life during the entire stay in the desert. If we had to pick specific days to commemorate this event, it would seem logical to pick the first days that we were living in those “sukkos” in the desert. Would this not have been right after we left Egypt? Why is there a six month space between the two? Shouldn't the order of the holidays be Passover, Sukkos, Shavuos, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur?

The writings of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler emphasize the importance

¹ Leviticus 23:4-44, and Numbers 28:16 - 29:12

² Sukkah 11b

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of celebrating a holiday at the appropriate time.³ He quotes his teacher, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Broyde of Kelm, who explained that when we celebrate a holiday, we do more than simply commemorate an event that happened long ago. Rather, time is cyclical. When we reach the time of year that a certain event occurred, there are certain influences and potentials based on that event. It is as though things that occur on the same day of the year are connected to one another. A classic example of this is the Nine Days, the first nine days of the month of Av. Jews are advised to minimize travel and business since it is an “unlucky” time for us. Both Temples were destroyed during that time, and countless tragedies have befallen us throughout the ages during that time. This being said, how can we have Sukkos after Yom Kippur if that is not where it belongs?

In the Talmud, the Rabbis state that a sukkah must not be taller than twenty cubits (roughly 30 - 40 feet).⁴ The Talmud goes on to discuss what is the source in the Torah from which the Rabbis derived that law. Three suggestions are offered, two of them from the text of the Torah in reference to Sukkos.

The third suggestion, by Rav Zeira, is that the source of this opinion is from Isaiah, where it says, “And the sukkah shall be as shade from the burning hot sun.”⁵ The sukkah gets its name from the branches that lie on top of it, which are called *s’chach*. Thus the most important part of the sukkah, that which defines the sukkah, are those branches. The passage states that “the sukkah—” the branches, that is—will provide shade. In a sukkah which is over twenty cubits tall, you will get shade not from the branches, but from the walls, assuming that the sukkah is not very wide.

The other Rabbis are perplexed with Rav Zeira’s suggestion. The passage he quotes is not talking about the holiday of Sukkos; it is talking about Messianic times. Rav Zeira responds that since the word used was “sukkah,” rather than another word for a covering, the passage is also hinting to a law about a sukkah.

There are two possible sources that literally refer to Sukkos. Doesn’t it seem a bit of a stretch to say that the Rabbis learned the law of a sukkah’s height from a passage referring to the coming of the Messiah,

³ *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, volume 2, p. 21

⁴ Sukkah 2a

⁵ Isaiah 4:6

a totally unrelated subject, instead of a source referring to Sukkos?

It is customary to recite Psalm 27 after the morning and evening prayers, from the beginning of the month of Elul through the day after Sukkos. This custom is based on the comments of *Yalkut Shimoni* on this Psalm. The Psalm says, “Of David; G-d is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? Indeed, He will hide me in His shelter (literally, *sukkō*, his sukkah) on the day of evil.” *Yalkut Shimoni* explains that G-d is “my light” on Rosh Hashanah, He is “my salvation” on Yom Kippur, and “He will hide me in His shelter” on Sukkos.

There are two important points to note. First of all, the phrase “He *will* hide me in His shelter—” in future tense, referring to Sukkos—sounds very much like the passage Rav Zeira quoted, “And the sukkah *will* be as shade from the burning hot sun—” also in future tense. Maybe that passage *does* have some connection to Sukkos.

Secondly, based on what *Yalkut Shimoni* told us, we now see that King David (who wrote the Psalms) asserts that the Torah put Sukkos after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur *on purpose*, for he puts them in the same order. That’s where Sukkos belongs.

Another point worth noting: The *Haftarah* we read on the first day of Sukkos is all about the coming of the Messiah.

In the sacred poem “Yedid Nefesh,” by Rabbi Eliezer Azikri (sixteenth century), the final verse is a request to G-d to “please be revealed and spread upon me, my beloved, the *sukkah* (shelter) of Your peace. Illuminate the world with Your glory, that we may rejoice and be glad with You. Hasten, show love, for the time has come, and show us grace as in days of old.” The poet asks G-d to bring the Messiah. Why is he talking about a sukkah?

When the Torah describes the holidays in the order that it does, it does so on purpose. The list of holidays is not merely a listing of past events. It is a time line which includes past, present and future.

First came Passover; we came to recognize that G-d is our Master, for He took us out of Egypt. Next came Shavuot; we accepted the Torah and have ever since been attempting to keep its laws properly. This is no easy feat. In the Rosh Hashanah prayers we say that even the angels tremble in fear on the Day of Judgment. Certainly none of us can claim to be better than angels. We are now at a point in history somewhere after the events of Shavuot. We have our orders and we are going through our lives trying to accomplish our goals. At the end of time, there is going to be the period of Rosh Hashanah, a time

when G-d will decide who can live and who must die; who has enough merit to be granted to see the coming of the Messiah, and who does not. Those that will live will not be perfect, either; however, G-d will forgive their sins—a cosmic Yom Kippur. The grand finale of the universe will then be Sukkos, the time when G-d will place us in His sukkah, presumably in the Clouds of Glory, and we will all be enveloped in the spiritual world.

The passage Rav Zeira uses *does* refer to Sukkos. “And the sukkah will be for shade from the burning hot sun,” refers to the protection G-d will provide us when the Messiah comes. This is what Sukkos represents. Rav Zeira understood that it is quite appropriate that the passage referring to the coming of the Messiah also refers to the holiday of Sukkos.

So the daunting question is, how do we move out of this pre-Messianic era, this troubled time preceding the coming of Messiah, and finally into Sukkos? The answer to that lies in another aspect of Sukkos: Unity.

Kli Yakar explains that the Four Species we shake represent the four types of Jews.⁶ The citron has both a taste and a good smell. It represents a person who has both Torah and good deeds. The myrtle branches have a good smell but no taste. It represents one who has good deeds but no Torah. The date palm branch has no smell, but it gives fruit. This represents one who has Torah but no good deeds. Finally, the willow branches which have neither quality represents people who have neither quality. On Sukkos we take all these people and put them together. The Jewish people must be united.

The *mitzvah* of sitting in the sukkah is also about unity. During the year we each live in our own, closed-off homes with various levels of creature comforts. On Sukkos, however, we are all the same. We leave our thick, segregating walls behind. We are all subject to the same weather. If it’s hot we all sweat, and if it rains we all get wet. We are all in this together. *Kli Yakar* explains that this is why *hak’hel*, the commandment for the king to read from the Torah to the entire nation once every seven years, must occur on Sukkos.⁷ The Hebrew word *hak’hel* means “gather together,” or “form into a group.” Sukkos is when we are all one.

⁶ Leviticus 23:7

⁷ Deuteronomy 31:10-13

Hating fellow Jews for no reason is what caused the destruction of the Temple. Only through loving our fellow Jews for no reason can it be rebuilt.

The Torah refers to Sukkos as *Chag Ha’asif*, the Holiday of the Gathering, which on a simple level is understood to refer to the fact that Sukkos is during the time of year in which the crops are harvested.⁸ We now understand that Sukkos is also about the gathering of *our people* from the far corners of the world, when the Messiah comes.

May we listen to what our sukkos and Four Species are trying to tell us—to love our fellow Jews—and thus may this Sukkos be the true Day of the Gathering.

⁸ Deuteronomy 16:13 (see Rashi’s commentary)

Appendix

Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud

The Writing of the Oral Torah

The essays in this collection draw on many sources, but an attentive reader will note that a good number of them are described as “Mishnah,” “Midrash,” and “Talmud.” The following paragraphs explain what these terms mean, and outline their roles in Jewish tradition.

In the Sinai desert, the Jewish people received the Torah. It was given to them in two forms: the Written and the Oral.

The Written Torah (*Torah Shebich’sav* in Hebrew) consisted then of the Five Books of Moses. Later, the writings of the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Hagiographa (*Kesuvim*, such as Psalms and the Five Megillos) were added.

The Oral Torah consisted of explanations of Scripture (for instance, that *tefillin*—phylacteries—must be black and square), as well as additional and supplemental laws (such as the obligation to light a menorah on Chanukah).¹

This second Torah remained a purely oral tradition for many centuries. Eventually, the Sages decided that an outline of this tradition must be composed and written down, to ensure that its transmission would continue undisturbed. The initial phase of this composition ended toward the end of the second century C.E., around 100 years after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem.

The central component of that outline is called the **Mishnah**. It contains quotes and legal opinions from sages who lived during and immediately after the era of the Second Temple. The Mishnah is or-

ganized into six series (*sedarim*), each of which contains several volumes (*mesechtos*).

Other teachings of the Sages of this period were compiled in a number of works, the majority of which are called **Midrash**. The Midrash is primarily concerned with explaining and expounding upon Scripture. Some Midrashim cover legal subjects, while others deal with the Biblical narrative, philosophy, and mysticism.

Over the next three or four centuries, two commentaries on the Mishnah were written. Both were called **Talmud**, and both are still studied today. One commentary, the Jerusalem Talmud, was composed by scholars living in Israel. The second, the Babylonian Talmud, became the central body of the now-written Oral Torah. Although many important works have been written in the centuries since (such as *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law), all of them draw on the principles outlined in the Talmud.

¹ See *Meshech Chochma*, Leviticus 23:24.